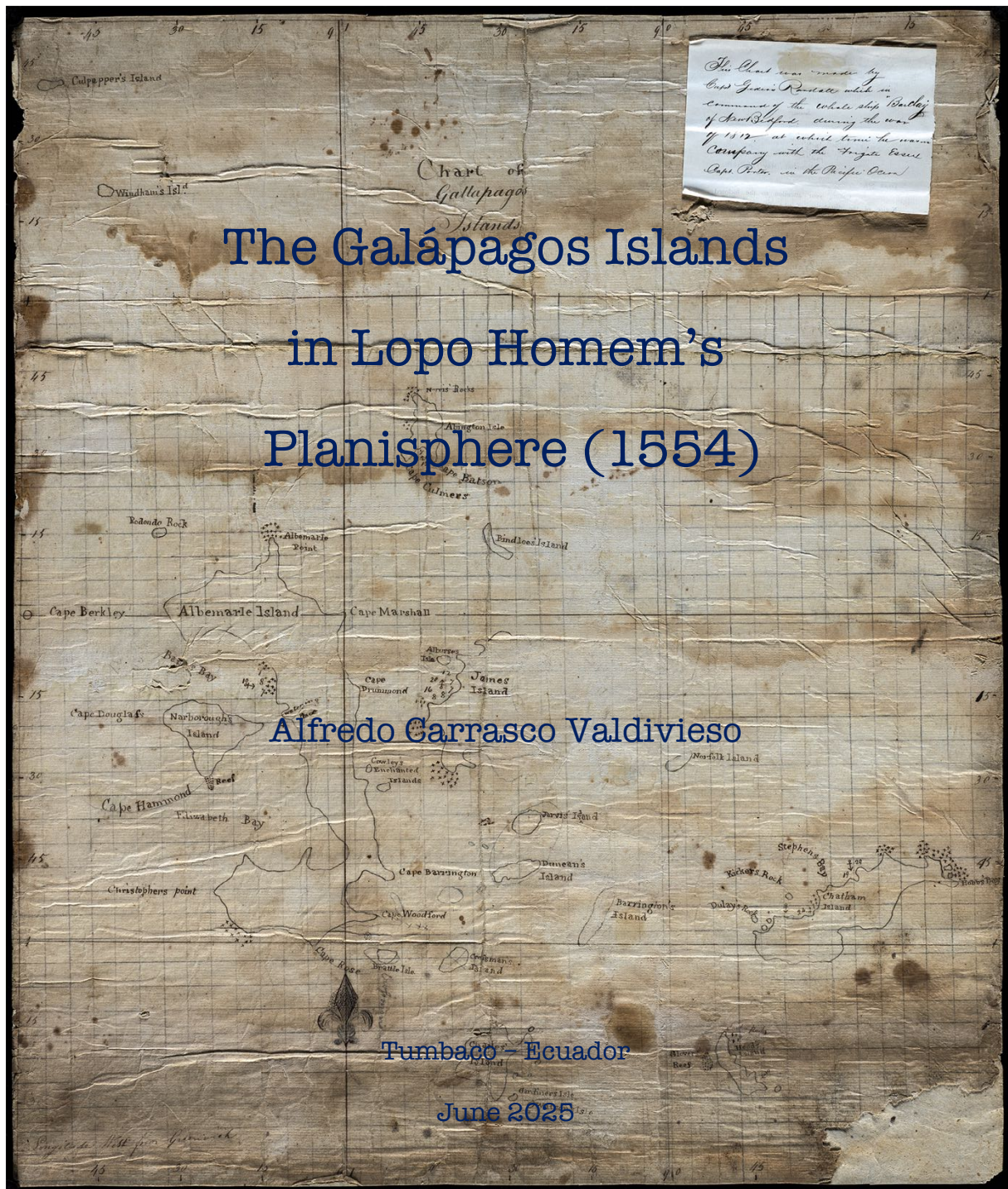




1812ca. Chart of Gallapagos Islands. Capt. Gideon Randall. Whale ship 'Barclay'. Commonwealth.

The Galápagos Islands in Lopo Homem's Planisphere (1554)

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Abstract

The Portuguese cartographer Lopo Homem was the first to explicitly record the Galápagos Islands on a map, identifying them as "*I. des galapagos*" in his 1554 planisphere. This designation predates by at least 15 years the better-known representations by Abraham Ortelius (1570) and Gerard Mercator (1569), who included the islands with toponymic errors and possible cartographic confusions. The evidence positions Homem's map as a milestone in the cartography of the MARE DEL SUR (southeastern Pacific), establishing the first precise nominal reference to the archipelago.

Lopo Homem's planisphere reveals a transition from speculative geography to empirical cartography, based on direct information from navigators and accounts such as the letter from Bishop Tomás de Berlanga, who described the islands after his accidental encounter with them in March 1535. It is suggested that Homem, due to his close ties with Iberian nautical circles and his participation in events like the Badajoz-Elvas Conferences (1524), had privileged access to restricted documents and maps from the Casa de Contratación in Seville, which would explain how a Portuguese cartographer managed to formally represent a territory under Spanish jurisdiction according to the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494).

The cartographic tradition of the Homem family, continued by his son Andreas (1559) and relative Diogo (1568), consolidated the presence of the Galápagos in the cartography of the 16th century. This Portuguese precedence over the more widely circulated printed maps of Ortelius and Mercator has historically been overshadowed by the limited distribution of Portuguese manuscript works. This current review corrects this omission and vindicates Portugal's pioneering role in the early incorporation of the Galápagos into the European geographic imaginary.

1 Introduction



1555. Cosmographie universelle, selon les navigateurs tant anciens que modernes.. Guillaume Le Testu
Biblioteca Nacional de Francia.Gallica - <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447838j>

The initial representation of the Galápagos Islands has been a subject of debate. Although commonly attributed to the maps of Abraham Ortelius (1570) or Gerard Mercator (1569), recent research points to Lopo Homem's 1554 Planisphere as the first documented reference, identifying them as "*I. des galapagos*."

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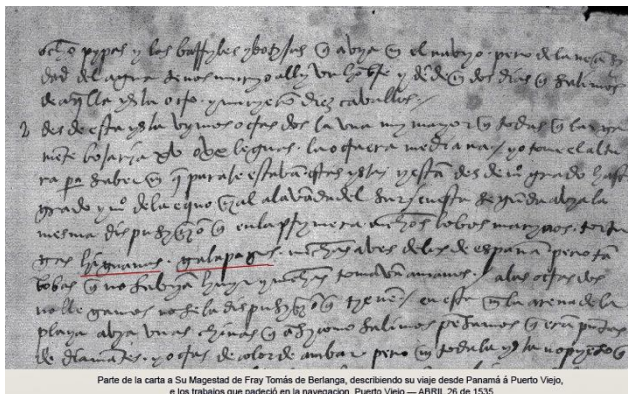
The analysis of 16th-century cartography shows how knowledge about this archipelago evolved. The Nautical Planisphere by Sancho Gutiérrez (1551) is a relevant precedent, as it includes the first graphic representation of the Galápagos, though without the specific designation later introduced by Homem.

The appearance of the archipelago in these early maps reflects the progress of Pacific exploration in a context of intense discoveries. Cartographers progressively integrated new territories as geographic knowledge expanded.

This chronological revision challenges the traditional narrative regarding the cartographic discovery of the Galápagos and positions Lopo Homem as a key figure. The explicit mention of “*I. des galapagos*” establishes precedence over earlier maps that depicted islands without names or later ones that only consolidated this designation.

2 Historical and Cartographic Context

The 16th century was a period of intense exploratory and cartographic activity driven by the Iberian powers. The search for trade routes to Asia and the exploration of American territories motivated expeditions that gradually delineated the coasts of the Pacific, as well as the Atlantic, of what is now the Americas. Figures such as Christopher Columbus, Vasco Núñez de Balboa (who sighted the South Sea in 1513), and Ferdinand Magellan (who crossed it between 1520–1521) laid the foundations for European geographic knowledge of this region.



In this context, Fray Tomás de Berlanga, Bishop of Panama, accidentally encountered the Galápagos Islands on March 10, 1535, during a voyage from Panama to Peru. In his letter to Emperor Charles V, Berlanga described a rocky archipelago where “*they found only sea lions, turtles, and galápagos so large that each could carry a man on its back, and many iguanas that are like serpents*”², providing the first

documented description of the archipelago and laying the foundation for its name.

Despite being reported in 1535, the Galápagos did not immediately attract colonization interest. Berlanga’s comments likely had an impact, as he noted, “*but in all the island, I do not think there is a place where one could sow a bushel of maize, because most of it is full of very large stones, as if at some time God had rained stones: and the land there is like slag, useless, as it has no capacity to grow even a bit of grass...*”³. This circumstance, combined with the difficulties of accurately determining geographic coordinates at the time, delayed their formal incorporation into cartography.

² Letter to His Majesty from Fray Tomás de Berlanga, describing his voyage from Panama to Puerto Viejo, and the labors he endured in the navigation.. – Puerto Viejo, Abril 26 de 1535. the original rests in the Archivo de Indias (Patronato, 2, 2, 2, 2), and there is a copy in the Col. Muñoz, volume LXXX, folios 92 and 93 (Note in Jiménez de la Espada: Las Islas de los Galápagos y otras más á Poniente). <https://whalesite.org/galapagos/1535%20-%20Berlanga%20-%20Letter%20Spanish.htm>

³ Idem. Letter to His Majesty from Fray Tomás de Berlanga

3 Chronology of Cartographic References

This study presents a chronological analysis of a series of representative maps that document the evolution of the cartographic representation of the Galápagos archipelago. By examining cartographic sources produced in the 16th century, it aims to demonstrate the transition from speculative geography to a more empirical and systematic representation of the southeastern Pacific, or the MARE DEL SUR as seen by the Spanish.

Pacific cartography evolved progressively from speculative representations to more accurate maps. Works such as Martin Waldseemüller's *Planisphere* (1507), the *Kunstmann IV Nautical Planisphere*⁴ (1519), and Lorenz Fries' *TABULA MODERNA ALTERIUS HEMISPHERII* (ca. 1525)⁵ began to outline the American coasts and some Pacific islands, albeit with significant inaccuracies in longitude and nomenclature.

3.1 Pre-1554 Maps

The maps reviewed below are part of the approximately 450 maps analyzed whose dates of production range from 1500 with the Universal Chart of Juan de la Cosa to 1553, documenting the early cartographic knowledge of the MARE DEL SUR. This selection includes fundamental works such as the *Tabula moderna alterius hemisphaerii* by Lorenz Fries (c. 1525), the Carta Portulana Anonima (c. 1525), the *Globo Nova et integra universi orbis descriptio* (1535), the Planisferio by Nicolas Desliens (1541), the *Mappemonde* by Pierre Desceliers (1546), the Atlas Vallard (1547) and the Planisferio Nautico by Sancho Gutierrez (1551).

These documents show the transition of European geographical knowledge from mythical representations to more precise empirical observations. The islands of the MARE DEL SUR - including the Galapagos, Cocos, La Plata, Malpelo, Gorgona, Coiba and the archipelago of the Perlas - gradually appear more accurately represented, evidencing the process of consolidation of cartographic knowledge during the Iberian expansion in America.

i. *Tabula moderna alterius hemisphaerii*: The "¿dihs or dins?" Islands of Lorenz Fries (c. 1525)



Tabula moderna alterius hemisphaerii. Lorenz Fries (c. 1525)

In his work *De orbe novo* (1530), Pedro Mártir de Anglería records the testimony of Rodericus Colmenares and Francisco de la Puente, dated October 14, 1516, mentioning the existence of islands located west of the Pearl Islands archipelago in the South Sea. According to the account, these islands harbored trees producing aromatic fruits similar to those of India. William Beebe (1924, p. 335)⁶ interprets this description as possibly referring to species of the genus

⁴ [Jorge Reinell], [Pedro Reinell], c. 1519, Kunstmann IV Nautical planisphere (facsimile by Otto Progel). Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/14> [The original was lost during World War II. Facsimile of 1843 by Otto Progel. First known nautical planisphere representing the entire equatorial circumference of the world.]

⁵ This map was acquired by Frederik Muller in 2008, in Colombia. It is considered an authentic map built before 1525 by the geographer Lorenz Fries.

⁶ Beebe, William. 1924. Galápagos: World's End. Quito : G.P. Putnam's Sons

Bursera, such as *Bursera graveolens* (palo santo), present in the Galápagos, Isla de la Plata, and other dry ecosystems of the Pacific coast; *B. simaruba* is found on Coiba Island. Thus, one might wonder if these are the islands with the scent of palo santo mentioned in the testimony recorded by Martyris in *De orbe nouo Petri Martyris ab Angleria Mediolanensis protonotarii C[aj]esaris senatoris decades*, published in 1530.

Beebe (1924) hypothesizes that these islands could correspond to the Galápagos (p. 335), suggesting a sighting prior to 1516. However, there is no conclusive cartographic evidence or other bibliographic references to support this claim. Among the few representations of the period, Lorenz Fries' map (*Tabula moderna alterius hemisphaerii*, ca. 1525)⁷ stands out, featuring islands with an illegible name ("¿dihs o dins?") located near the equator (1° N, 268° longitude).

According to Muller (2011)⁸, these islands could be interpreted as: (1) mythical entities common in premodern cartography; (2) islands in the Gulf of San Miguel, sighted by Balboa in 1513; or (3) Coiba Island, explored by Bartolomé Hurtado in 1516⁹. In the Turin Map (ca. 1523), an "*ifla de coiuá*" is explicitly mentioned, possibly the first nominal reference to Coiba.

Martyris' work represents a turning point between imaginary geography and empirical observation of the Pacific. Fries' cartography, meanwhile, constitutes an early testimony of European knowledge about this region, reflecting the coexistence of mythical elements and observational data in the early decades of European contact with the Americas.

ii. Anonymous Portolan Chart (ca. 1525)



This document, preserved in the Library of Congress of the United States, depicts various islands in the eastern Pacific, including—though without explicit nomenclature—territories identifiable as Puna, Santa Clara, La Plata, Gorgona, Malpelo, Coco, Coiba, and the Pearl Islands archipelago; it also represents the Gulf of Guayaquil¹⁰, suggesting a more detailed geographic knowledge of the region.

Although dated around 1500, this chronology is inconsistent with the degree of geographic precision it presents, especially considering that many of these islands were recognized and documented from the 1520s onward. The MEDEA historical map database suggests a later dating, placing it around 1525.

This portolan chart constitutes significant evidence of early nautical knowledge of the South American Pacific coast, reflecting both the circulation of empirical information among navigators and the consolidation of strategic maritime routes in the context of Iberian expansion.

⁷ Idem. Acquired by Frederik Muller in 2008, in Colombia.

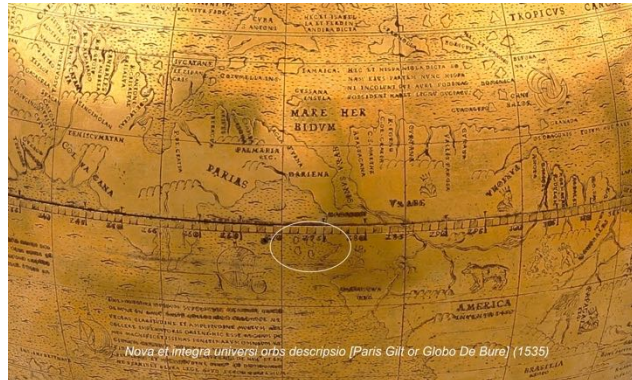
⁸ Muller, Frederik PhD (2011). *Tabula moderna alterius hemisphaerii* Manuscript map on paper, no date but before May 11, 1525, assigned to Lorenz Fries. CONCEPT.

⁹ de Altolaguirre y Duvalé A. (1914). VASCO NÚÑEZ DE BALBOA. Estudio Histórico. Real Academia de la Historia. MADRID. Imprenta del Patronato de Huérfanos de Intendencia é Intervención Militares. Caracas, numero 7. 1914 (pg. 144 – 150)

¹⁰ Portolana Chart of the Pacific Coast from Mexico to Northern Chile. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4412c.ct002415r> / <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/895>

iii. *Nova et integra universi orbi descriptio* [Paris Gilt or Globo De Bure] (1535)

The anonymous globe known as *Nova et integra universi orbi descriptio*¹¹, also called the *Paris Gilt* or *De Bure Globe*, is one of the earliest cartographic representations of the southeastern Pacific. Dated between 1527 and 1535, this globe shows four unidentified islands located between 1° and 2° south latitude and between 272° and 274° longitude.



The absence of specific toponymy prevents precise identification of these islands, which could correspond to the Pearl Islands, Malpelo, or Gorgona. This ambiguity is confirmation of the limitations of European geographic knowledge during the first half of the 16th century, as well as the coexistence of empirical observation and geographic imagination in Renaissance cartography.

The analysis of this document reveals an intermediate stage in the conceptualization of the New World, integrating data from recent explorations with elements inherited from medieval tradition. Its study provides a better understanding of the processes of symbolic construction of American territory and early exploration routes in the Pacific.

iv. Planisphere de Nicolas Desliens (1541)



The Nautical Planisphere of Nicolas Desliens, traditionally dated to 1541, though recent research suggests a date closer to 1561¹², is one of the earliest cartographic representations of Cocos Island. In this map, the island appears identified as "*I. coques*", located around 2° N, at a longitude comparable to that of Lake Cocibolca (Nicaragua).

Desliens' work is part of the Norman cartographic tradition, influenced by Desceliers' maps. The inclusion of "*y^e de Coques*" represents an early recognition of this territory in 16th-century cartography. The map also depicts other eastern Pacific islands, such as Santa Clara, Puna, Gorgona, and possibly Malpelo, though without specific toponymy. It also represents the Pearl Islands and Coiba, although the document's deterioration makes it difficult to confirm whether they are named.

Preserved in the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden*, this planisphere is a key source for studying geographic knowledge of the American Pacific during

¹¹ *Nova et integra universi orbi descriptio* [Paris Gilt or De Bure Globe]. <https://www.myoldmaps.com/renaissance-maps-1490-1800/344-the-paris-gilt-or-de/344-gilt-globe2.pdf>

¹² Nicolas Desliens, 1541. Nautical planisphere. <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/1558> / <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/6809> / <https://www.myoldmaps.com/3933-desliens.pdf>

the early colonial period. Its value lies in documenting the presence of Cocos Island in the European cartographic imaginary decades before its systematic exploration.

v. Mappemonde de Pierre Desceliers (1546)

In 1546, [Pierre Desceliers](#)¹³ published his [Mappemonde](#), preserved in the National Library of Australia, which includes “y^e de coques” located approximately two degrees north of the equator. This location has sparked debate, as it could be interpreted as a reference to the Galápagos Islands, whose geographic position is further south, in contrast to earlier maps that place “I. Cocos” in northern latitudes.



The map presents a sequence of islands in the eastern Pacific, including “y^e de gatos”, “y^e de sa marie”, “y^e de selaco” [Sebaco Island] and, again, “y^e de sa marie”, the latter inscribed in red ink, possibly added later. Part of this inscription overlaps with “y^e de selaco”, suggesting a subsequent intervention in the document. Other islands identified include “y^{es} de perles”, Gorgona, La Plata, La Vieille and Se. Clarie, the latter corresponding to Puna and Santa Clara, respectively.

Desceliers’ work reflects the complexity of Renaissance cartography, combining empirical observations with symbolic and religious elements, shaping a worldview in transition toward scientific modernity.

vi. Atlas Vallard de Nicolas Vallard (1547)

The Atlas Vallard, produced in 1547¹⁴ and attributed to the Dieppe cartographic school, is one of the most notable works of the 16th century due to its rich iconography and value as a testimony to European expansion¹⁵. Although its authorship is anonymous, it is associated with Nicolas Vallard of Dieppe, its first known owner. The atlas, preserved in the Huntington Library (California), contains 15 richly illustrated nautical charts with an inverted orientation (south at the top), reflecting graphic conventions of the time.



¹³ Faictes à Arques par Pierre Desceliers presbre 1546 cartographic material / facsimile reproduction by E. Rembielinski. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231279946/vie>

¹⁴ 1547. Nicolas Vallard. Portolan atlas: West Indies, Mexico, Central America, northern South America [Atlas Vallard]. Huntington Digital Library. <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/53432>

¹⁵ de Queiroz Pinto, Luciana (2023). Atlas Vallard: Uma narrativa francesa da América em meados do século xvi. RIRA, vol. 8, n.º 2 (noviembre 2023), pp. 15-38. <https://revistas.pucp.edu.pe/index.php/revistaira/article/view/28103/26049>

In one of its charts, in the South Sea, an island identified as “*Las Defertas*” is depicted, located approximately at 2° N and at a longitude similar to that of Coiba. The location and insular configuration represented “coincide” with Malpelo Island.

The Atlas Vallard stands out for its fusion of Portuguese and French elements, suggesting a circulation of cartographic models between both traditions. Its value lies not only in the geographic information it contains but also in its role as a political and symbolic instrument in the context of European maritime expansion.

vii. Nautical Planisphere of Sancho Gutiérrez (1551)

The Nautical Planisphere elaborated by Sancho Gutiérrez¹⁶ in 1551 is one of the earliest cartographic representations of the southeastern Pacific that implicitly includes the Galápagos archipelago. This map, preserved in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, is “in advance” Lopo Homem’s 1554 planisphere, which establishes the first explicit representation of the Galápagos Islands.

In Gutiérrez’s map, a group of islands is observed in the “MAR DEL SUR” approximately at 1° south latitude and near 90° west longitude, “coinciding” with the geographic location of the archipelago. However, several factors limit the possibility of considering this representation as the first formal cartographic reference to the Galápagos.



Unlike other eastern Pacific islands explicitly named in the map, such as Malpelo, Gorgona, La Plata, Puna, Santa Clara, and the Pearl Islands, those corresponding to the Galápagos and Cocos lack specific nomenclature. This omission is significant, as it prevents an unequivocal identification of the archipelago in the cartographic context of the time.

Gutiérrez’s map is based on the *Padrón Real*, the official master map of the Casa de la Contratación in Seville, and likely incorporates information derived from Bishop Tomás de

¹⁶ 1551. Sancho de Gutierrez. Nautical planisphere. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. <https://digital.onb.ac.at/rep/osd/?11105208> / <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/1439>

Berlanga's letter (1536), who described the islands after their accidental sighting in 1535. However, the omission of the names "Galápagos" and "Cocos" could be due to several factors: a lack of consensus on official nomenclature in 1551, caution in naming islands whose identification was still uncertain, or prioritization of already established and recognizable names for navigators.

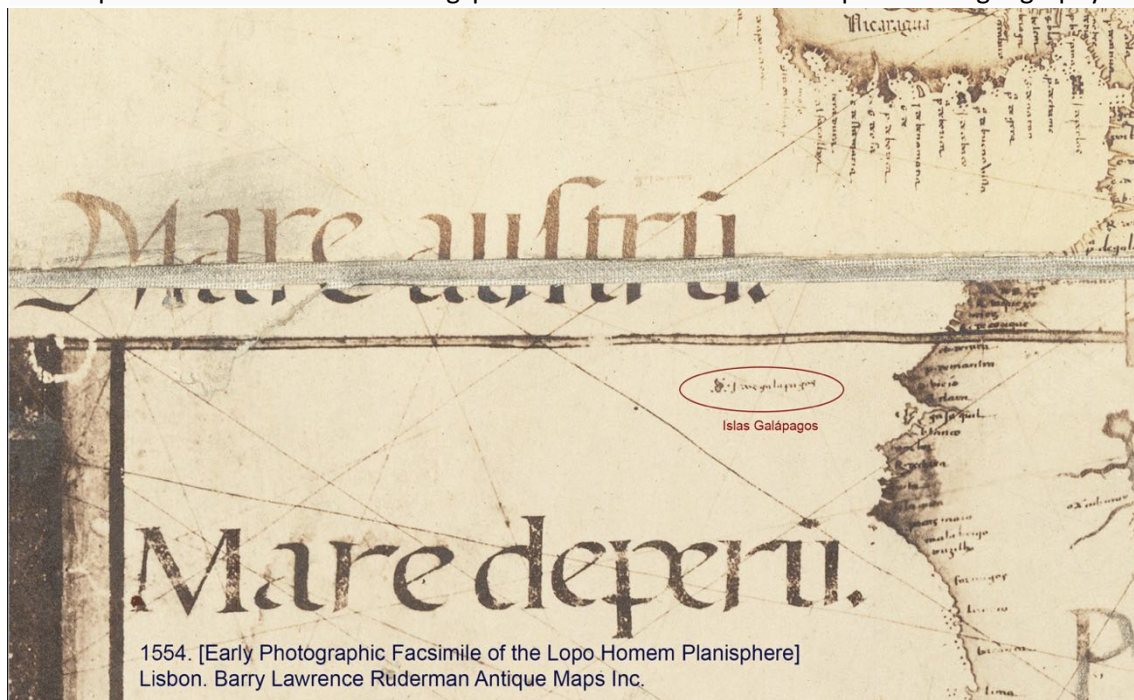
Although the map geographically represents the islands in a location consistent with the Galápagos¹⁷, the absence of nominal identification prevents it from being considered an explicit reference. In historiographic terms, this distinction is crucial: visual representation without toponymy does not equate to formal recognition of the archipelago in cartography.

The map was produced in a context of growing Spanish interest in the Pacific, linked to routes to Peru and the pearl trade in Panama. In addition to depicting several coastal islands in detail, its greatest contribution lies in the inclusion of the Galápagos archipelago, symbolizing the advancement of Spanish geographic knowledge and the transition to a more empirical and globalized cartography.

Although the *Nautical Planisphere* of 1551 is a valuable testimony to early geographic knowledge of the Pacific, its contribution should be understood as a preliminary representation and not as the first formal cartographic identification of the Galápagos archipelago.

3.2 1554: The Planisphere of Lopo Homem

The *Planisferio de Lopo Homem*, elaborated in 1554¹⁸, constitutes a fundamental milestone in the history of Pacific cartography [MARE AUSTRU / MARE DEPERU], being the first known European map to explicitly identify the Galápagos archipelago under the designation "*I. des galapagos*". This representation marks a turning point in the transition from speculative geography to



¹⁷ Carrasco V. A (2025). Nautical Planisphere by Sancho Gutierrez (1551) Galapagos Islands in the Southern Sea? https://www.academia.edu/129360427/Nautical_Planisphere_by_Sancho_Gutierrez_1551_Galapagos_Islands_in_the_Southern_Sea

¹⁸ 1554. Lopo Homem. Planisphere. Padrón Real. Museo Galileo / Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc. <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/67276/early-photographic-facsimile-of-the-lopo-homem-planisphere-homem>

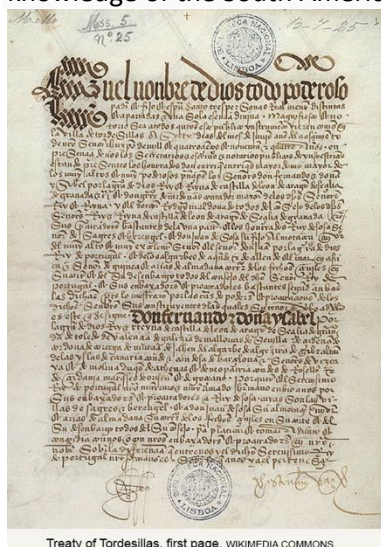
empirical cartography, based on direct observations and the circulation of nautical reports among explorers and cosmographers.

The inclusion of the toponym “galapagos” is directly linked to the testimony of Bishop Tomás de Berlanga, who sighted the islands in 1535 during an accidental voyage from Panama to Peru. In his letter to Emperor Charles V (1536), describes the presence of large terrestrial tortoises, referred to as “galapagos”, a term that later gave the archipelago its name. Although the letter circulated in manuscript form, its content would have been known in nautical and cosmographic circles, particularly in the Casa de la Contratación in Seville¹⁹, where Lopo Homem likely accessed this information.

In the planisphere, the islands are located approximately at 2° south latitude, aligned longitudinally with the Puntilla de Santa Elena and the Guayaquil region. This location, though not exact, indicates relatively precise knowledge of regional geography, especially considering the technical difficulties of the time in determining longitude. In addition to the Galápagos, the map includes other relevant eastern Pacific islands, such as Cebaco [Coiba?], the Pearl Islands, Puna, and Santa Clara, reinforcing its value as a source for studying maritime routes and 16th-century geographic knowledge. It does not include Cocos, Malpelo, or Gorgona islands.

Lopo Homem, a renowned Portuguese cartographer, was part of a family of cosmographers in service to the Portuguese crown. His work combines elements of the Portuguese cartographic tradition with Spanish influences, suggesting an exchange of information between the two Iberian powers. The relative accuracy in the location of the Galápagos indicates that Homem integrated recent empirical data, possibly derived from reports like Berlanga's or from navigators linked to the Pacific route.

The *Planisferio* of 1554 is not only significant for being, with certainty, the first nominal representation of the Galápagos but also for its value as a historical and scientific document; it is also the first known map to depict Argentina as “*Terra Argentea*”, evidencing detailed knowledge of the South American coast. Consequently, it shows the progressive advancement of European knowledge about the extra-European world and the consolidation of a more systematic cartography. It also demonstrates the strategic importance of the southeastern Pacific in the context of Iberian imperial expansion, where the Galápagos began to acquire a place in the Western geographic imaginary.



Treaty of Tordesillas, first page. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Lopo Homem's map is a key piece in the history of Pacific cartography. Its study allows for an understanding not only of the technical evolution of cartographic representation but also of the processes of symbolic appropriation of American territory by 16th-century colonial powers.

It is intriguing that Homem, a Portuguese cartographer, was the first to cite the Galápagos on a map, given that they were

¹⁹ According to strict rules of the Casa de Contratación, Spanish pilots were required to update the Padrón and keep maps secret. This policy of confidentiality was replicated in other countries, such as Portugal, where King Manuel forbade the disclosure of roteiros and nautical charts under penalty of death. Only pilots authorized by the King could use the Padrón Real, which meant that unauthorized voyages lacked, at least in theory, updated nautical charts of the Americas. (Antonio Crespo Sanz (2012). El padrón real. Una base de datos cartográfica en continua actualización. Catastro. <https://www.catastro.hacienda.gob.es/documentos/publicaciones/ct/ct76/4.pdf>).

within the Spanish sphere according to the [Treaty of Tordesillas](#)²⁰ of 1494. Lopo Homem may have accessed information from the Casa de la Contratación in Seville, where documents such as Berlanga's letter (1536) and Ribadeneira's reports (1546) circulated. His participation in the preliminary meetings of the Badajoz-Elvas Conferences²¹ in 1524, as an expert witness in territorial disputes²² alongside figures like Hernando Colón, Sebastián Caboto, or Juan Vespucci²³, indicates that he likely had access to Spanish cartographic information. Additionally, the rivalry and espionage between Portugal and Spain in the 16th century facilitated the exchange of information, which could explain how Homem incorporated details of the Galápagos, possibly based on the abundance of tortoises described by Berlanga.

3.3 Cartography After 1554

The maps analyzed from this period are part of a sample of about 200 cartographic works that were produced between 1555 and 1570, the year in which the Ortelius map was published. Among the selected works are the *Universa ac Navigabilis Terrarum Orbis Descriptio* by Andreas Homem (1559), the Carta Portulana Anónima (c. 1565), the Chart of Central America and the Caribbean Sea by Diogo Homem (1568), the *Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio* by Gerard Mercator (1569) and the *Americae Sive Novi Orbis, Nova Descriptio* by Abraham Ortelius (1570).

This period represents the consolidation of the representation of the Galapagos Islands in 16th century cartography, as evidenced by their systematic appearance under various names, such as "I. de los Galapagoes", "ys de galapagos" and "y de los galopegos". The documents analyzed show a progressive refinement of the geographical knowledge of the eastern Pacific, the persistence of toponymic confusions between different archipelagos, and a transition towards a more systematic cartography with greater diffusion at the continental level.

i. *Universa ac Navigabilis Terrarum Orbis Descriptio* of Andreas Homem (1559)

The Planisphere of Andreas Homem²⁴, titled [Universa ac Navigabilis Terrarum Orbis Descriptio](#), was elaborated in 1559 in Antwerp by this Portuguese cartographer, son of the renowned Lopo Homem. This work represents one of the most ambitious cartographic syntheses of the 16th century, integrating nautical and geographic information accumulated by the Iberian powers during the early decades of Atlantic and Pacific exploration.

In this planisphere, the Galápagos Islands are identified as "*I. de los Galapagoes*", in a position similar to that recorded by Lopo Homem in 1554. The representation includes five islands, suggesting an intention to reflect the archipelago's insular configuration in greater detail. This toponymic reiteration reinforces the nomenclature established by his predecessor and confirms the consolidation of the archipelago in the European cartographic imaginary.

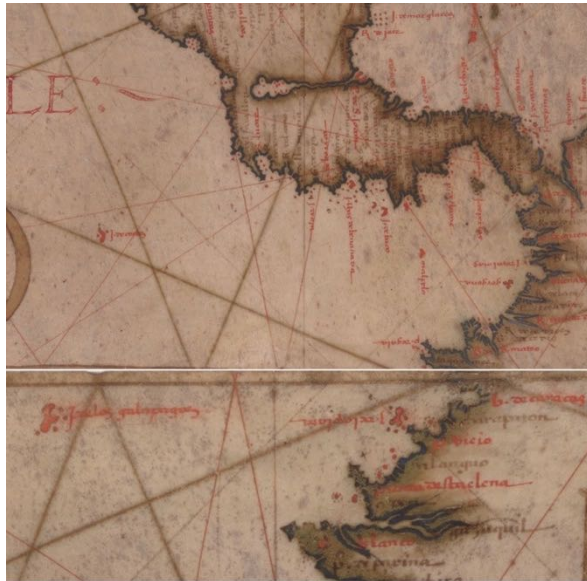
²⁰ On June 7, 1494, in the town of Tordesillas, Castile and Portugal signed a treaty that divided the Atlantic Ocean by means of a line drawn from pole to pole, 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, leaving the eastern hemisphere for the Crown of Portugal and the western hemisphere for the Crown of Castile. <https://www.tordesillas.net/descubre-tordesillas/historia/el-tratado-de-tordesillas>

²¹ Meeting of expert cosmographers, pilots and jurists from both kingdoms (Portugal and Spain) to elucidate who was right about the location of the Spice or Molucca Islands.

²² Lopo Homem. Published November 13, 2024. <https://www.esascosas.com/lopo-homem/>

²³ Exposición carto-bibliográfica: «A quinientos años de las Juntas de Badajoz-Elvas (1524-2024)» Obra del mes de junio. <https://rebis.csic.es/biblioteca/?p=32782#:~:text=Las%20juntas%20se%20celebraron%20en,Sebasti%C3%A1n%20Caboto%20o%20Juan%20Vespucci.>

²⁴ 1559. Andreas Homem. *Universa ac navigabilis totius terrarum orbis descriptio*. Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/102>



1559. *Universa ac navigabilis* to - tius terrarum orbis descrip... Andreas Homem. Bibliothèque nationale de France

Homem's work stands out for its relative precision in locating coasts, islands, and geographic features, as well as its careful ornamentation and use of latitude and longitude scales. The map was conceived not only as a navigation tool but also as an object of scientific and political prestige, intended for European courts and scholarly circles.

The inclusion of the Galápagos in this context indicates the growing interest in the southeastern Pacific, particularly in relation to routes to Peru and the consolidation of Spanish dominance in the region. Homem's planisphere is thus a key source for studying the evolution of Renaissance cartography and the early representation of the archipelago in European maps.

ii. Anonymous Portolan Chart (ca. 1565)



1565ca. Carta Portulana de las costas del Pacífico de Guatemala al Norte de Perú, con las islas Galápagos. Library of Congress

The *Anonymous Portolan Chart*²⁵, preserved in the Library of Congress of the United States and dated approximately to 1565, represents one of the most detailed cartographic pieces of evidence of European knowledge about the eastern Pacific in the 16th century. Drawn on leather, it depicts the Pacific coast from Guatemala to northern Peru. Although its authorship is unknown, this nautical chart has been analyzed for including one of the first representations of the Galápagos archipelago under the designation "*ys de galapagos*",

though it is suggested that the representation on the map may be later than 1569.²⁶

The document records a group of twelve islands under the name Galápagos, indicating an effort to reflect the archipelago's morphology with greater fidelity. It also includes references to other Pacific islands such as Y^a de Plata, Malpelo, Coco, and Y^a las Perlas, suggesting an integration of information from various nautical and exploratory sources. The chart also mentions Landecho, a port built in 1561 in the Tivives inlet [now Caldera, Costa Rica], named after Juan Núñez (or

²⁵ 1565ca_Portolan chart of the Pacific coast from Guatemala to northern Peru with the Galapagos Islands_1565_service-gmd-gmd4-g4802-g4802c-ct001180-Library of Congress

²⁶ Carrasco V.A (2025). Portolan Chart of the Pacific Coast from Guatemala to Northern Peru, with the Galapagos Islands (ca. 1565). https://www.academia.edu/128364308/Portolan_Chart_of_the_Pacific_Coast_from_Guatemala_to_Northern_Peru_with_the_Galapagos_Islands_ca_1565

Martínez) de Landecho²⁷, president and governor of the Audiencia de los Confines (Guatemala) between 1559 and 1564.

This portolan chart is part of the Mediterranean cartographic tradition, characterized by the use of rhumb lines, nautical orientation, and detailed representation of coasts and islands. Its elaboration responds to the practical needs of navigation but also reflects a growing systematization of geographic knowledge in the context of imperial expansion.

The nominal presence of the Galápagos in this chart confirms their definitive incorporation into the European cartographic repertoire. Its detailed representation, though still imprecise in terms of scale and orientation, constitutes a significant advance over earlier maps. The Anonymous *Portolan Chart* of ca. 1565 is a testimony to the process of discovery, symbolic appropriation, and representation of the archipelago in 16th-century cartography.

iii. Chart of the Central America and the Caribbean Sea de Diogo Homem (1568)

Continuing with the cartographic exploration of the 16th century is the nautical chart attributed to Diogo Homem, preserved in the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek* and available online through the MEDEA²⁸ portal.

This chart, centered on the South American region, includes a series of insular toponyms that allow for the inference of navigation routes and areas of strategic interest for European explorers.



Diogo Homem, Portuguese cartographer, was the son of Lopo Homem and brother of Andreas Homem, both active in the production of nautical maps during the Renaissance. It is particularly significant that both Lopo (1554) and Andreas (1559) had already represented the Galápagos Islands in their charts, making Portuguese cartographers the first to record this archipelago in the cartography of the 16th century, anticipating more well-known figures like Abraham Ortelius and Gerardus Mercator, who did not include the Galápagos until later dates.

Among the places mentioned in Diogo Homem's chart are islands such as D.^a María, S.^a María, Cébaco, Perlas, Malpelo, Gorgona, La Plata, Ijola la Puna and Santa Clara. The presence of these names demonstrates detailed knowledge of the Pacific coast, from Central America to the northwestern coast of South America. The traditional continuity of the Homem family in including the Galápagos Islands is particularly significant, evidencing their early incorporation into 16th century cartography. His father, Lopo Homem, had privileged access to Spanish cartographic records.

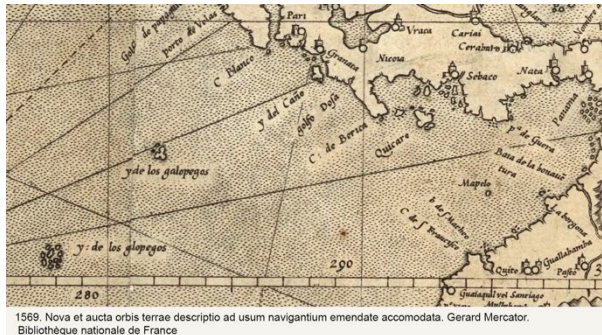
The analysis of these elements allows not only for the reconstruction of maritime trajectories but also for understanding how insular spaces were represented and conceptualized in Renaissance cartography. In this sense, Diogo Homem's chart constitutes a primary source of

²⁷ Cabezas Carcahe, Horacio (2016). *Gobernantes de Guatemala - Siglo XVI*. Universidad Mesoamericana, Guatemala. (pg. 41). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301699277_Gobernantes_de_Guatemala_-_Siglo_XVI

²⁸ 1568. Diogo Homem. Chart of South America. *Sächsische Landesbibliothek*. <https://medea.fc.ul.pt/view/chart/2088>

great value for the study of historical geography and European maritime expansion in the New World.

iv. *Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio* de Gerard Mercator (1569)



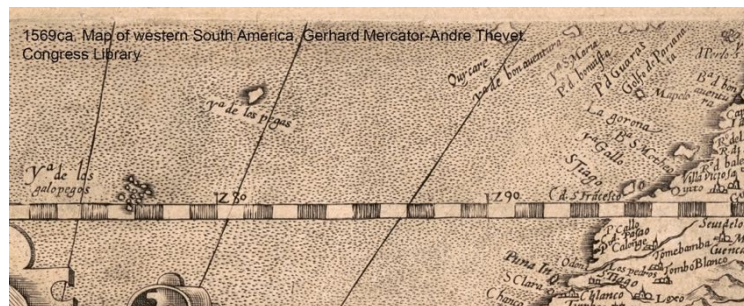
Gerardus Mercator's planisphere²⁹, titled *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio ad Usum Navigantium Emendate Accomodata*, published in 1569, represents one of the most influential works in the history of cartography. This map introduced for the first time the projection that bears his name, designed to facilitate navigation by representing constant course lines as straight lines.

Although its geographic accuracy was limited in certain regions, its practical utility made it a cartographic standard for centuries.

Regarding the southeastern Pacific, Mercator's map includes a representation of the Galápagos archipelago under the designation "y de los glopegos". This toponymic form, though distorted, insinuates a phonetic derivation of the term "galapagos", already established in earlier maps like that of Lopo Homem (1554). However, Mercator also makes a notable confusion by identifying Cocos Island as "y de los galepegos" or "y de las pegas", indicating a possible reliance on secondary sources or derived maps with transmission errors.

Mercator's cartography was based on a combination of sources: Portuguese and Spanish portolan charts, navigators' reports, and earlier works like those of Homem. This integration of empirical data and theoretical models shows the spirit of Renaissance cartography, which sought to systematize geographic knowledge in a coherent and functional framework.

The inclusion of the Galápagos, though with nomenclature errors, confirms their incorporation into the European geographic imaginary. Mercator's map not only consolidated a new way of representing the world but also contributed to fixing the presence of the archipelago in navigation routes and the scientific cartography of the time.



v. *Americae Sive Novi Orbis, Nova Descriptio* de Abraham Ortelius (1570)

Published in 1570 as part of the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, the first modern atlas in history, Abraham Ortelius' map *Americae Sive Novi Orbis, Nova Descriptio*³⁰ represents a cartographic synthesis of European geographic knowledge about the Americas in the 16th century. Ortelius, a Flemish cartographer, compiled and harmonized maps from various authors, standardizing

²⁹ 1569. Gerard Mercator. *Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio ad usum navigantium emendate accomodata* : illustriss... principi... Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7200344k/f7.item>

³⁰ 1570. Abraham Ortelius. *Americae Sive Novi Orbis, Nova Descriptio*. Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b23004674/f2.item.r=Ortelius,%20Abraham>

them in format and style, which allowed for broader and more coherent dissemination of geographic knowledge.



In this map, the Galápagos Islands appear represented as a group of eight islands under the name “*Inf: de los galepegos*”, located near the 280° meridian, roughly corresponding to their actual position. Cocos Island, on the other hand, is identified as “*Inf: de los galepegos*”, suggesting a persistent toponymic confusion

between the two archipelagos, possibly derived from earlier cartographic sources.

The representation of the Galápagos in Ortelius’ map has traditionally been considered one of the first in a printed atlas, though it is 16 years later than Lopo Homem’s planisphere. However, its inclusion in a widely circulated work like the *Theatrum* significantly contributed to the consolidation of the archipelago in cartography. It is worth noting that Ortelius published in 1564 *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis iuxta Neotericorum Traditiones Descriptio*³¹, which does not mention the Galápagos Islands but includes “y. de Cocos”, “y. di Perla”, “La Corona” [Gorgona] and “y. della Plata”.

Ortelius relied on an extensive network of collaborators and sources, including Portuguese and Spanish maps. The relative accuracy in the location of the islands and their differentiation from other eastern Pacific islands reflect an advance in the systematization of geographic knowledge.

Overall, Ortelius’ map represents a key moment in the history of cartography: the transition from isolated maps to a global and coherent vision of the world. The presence of the Galápagos in this work not only confirms their integration into the European geographic imaginary but also highlights the role of cartography as an instrument of knowledge, power, and symbolic representation of territory.

4 Historical Review: The Galapagos in the Maps of the 16th Century

The historiography of the representation of the Galapagos Islands in 16th century cartography has traditionally been dominated by the attribution of their visual discovery to Abraham Ortelius (1570) and Gerard Mercator (1569). This narrative has been sustained by numerous authors, including Vidal Gormaz (1890)³², Bognoly and Espinosa (1904)³³, the Handbooks Prepared Under the Direction of the Historical Section of His Majesty's Foreign Office No. 140 (1920, p. 7)³⁴, William Beebe (1924)³⁵, Carlos Manuel Larrea (1958)³⁶, Jorge Villacrés Moscoso

³¹ 1564. Abraham Ortelius. *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis iuxta Neotericorum Traditiones Descriptio*. Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc. <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/67277/early-photographic-facsimile-nova-totius-terrarum-orbis-iu-ortelius>

³² Vidal Gormaz en el Anuario hidrográfico de la Marina de Chile (1890) , con el título de El Archipiélago de las Galápagos, y reproducido en el t. xxx del BOLETIN (números 1 , 2 y 3).

³³ Bognoly J.A y José Moisés espinosa (1904). LAS YSLAS ENCANTADAS O EL ARCHIPIÉLAGO DE COLON. Guayaquil. Imp. Y Lit. del Comercio.

³⁴ 1920. Galápagos Islands. Handbooks Prepared Under the Direction of The Historical Section of The Foreign Office.— No. 140. Published By H.M. Stationery Office. London

³⁵ Beebe, William. 1924. Galápagos: World's End. Quito : G.P. Putnams Sons

³⁶ Larrea Carlos Manuel (1960). El Archipiélago de Colón (Galápagos). Segunda Edición, Quito, Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana.

(1985)³⁷, Cuesta Domingo (1986)³⁸, Michael H. Jackson (1985³⁹, 1993⁴⁰), Hugo Idrovo (2005)⁴¹, Paul D. Stewart et al. (2006)⁴² and Sabrina Guerra (2017)⁴³. However, increasing access to digitized sources has enabled a critical reevaluation of this perspective.

Cuesta Domingo (1986) proposes that the islands might have appeared earlier in the Padrón Real or in works such as João de Lisboa's *Livro de Marinharia* (1560); while Octavio Latorre (1993) points to the existence of an anonymous portolan dated 1565 (although he proposes it corresponds to 1561) as the first cartographic representation of the archipelago. This hypothesis has been reinforced by Edgardo Civallero (2023), who argues that said map could have influenced the later works of Mercator and Ortelius, and even mentions the existence of earlier maps with unidentified islands that might correspond to the Galápagos. Guerra (2023)⁴⁴ points out that the Portuguese cartographer Diogo Homem in his atlases published in 1561, 1565 and 1568 draws the Galapagos archipelago near the outline of the American continent.

The appearance of these early maps indicates that the history of Pacific cartography is more complex and richer than previously thought. Furthermore, it allows recognition of the role of Portuguese cartographers and other lesser-known figures in constructing the geographical imagination of the New World.

Researchers such as Vidal Gormaz, Beebe, Bognoly, Espinosa, Larrea, Jackson and Latorre himself devoted considerable efforts to tracking down documents scattered in archives and libraries across different countries. Today, thanks to digital portals, it is possible to access ancient maps from anywhere in the world, which has democratized the study of historical cartography. This accessibility has facilitated the rediscovery of early representations of the Galápagos, which previously could only be consulted by specialists with physical access to the archives.

5 Conclusions

Cartographic historiography finds itself in a process of transformation. Digitization not only expands the chronological horizon of Pacific representation, but also enables a critical revision of sources and their interpretations. This process invites broader reflection on how historical narratives are constructed and who is recognized as their protagonists.

In this context, the analysis of the “Cartographic Presence of the Galápagos Islands in the 16th Century” allows us to assert with foundation that the Portuguese cartographer Lopo Homem was the first to nominally and explicitly record the Galápagos Islands in cartography, in his 1554 planisphere. This fact invites a reconfiguration of the chronology of the archipelago's presence

³⁷ Villacrés M.J. (1985). *Las Ambiciones Internacionales por las Islas galápagos*. Edit. Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, Núcleo del Guayas. Guayaquil.

³⁸ Cuesta Domingo M. (1986). Las islas Galápagos en la dinámica del Océano Pacífico pp: 5 – 36). En: *Revista de Historia Naval*. Instituto de Historia y Cultura Naval. Armada española. Año IV 1986 No. 12. <https://armada.defensa.gob.es/archivo/mardigitalrevistas/rhn/1986/1986n12.pdf>

³⁹ Michael H. Jackson (1985). *Galápagos a Natural History Guide*. The University of Calgary Press.

⁴⁰ Michael H. Jackson (1993). *Galápagos a Natural History Guide*. The University of Calgary Press.

⁴¹ Idrovo Hugo (20025). *Galapagos footsteps in paradise*. Ediciones Libri Mundi / Enrique Grosse-Luemern. Quito

⁴² Stewart P. et. al (2006). *Galápagos The Islands that Changed the World*. BBC Books.

⁴³ Guerra Moscoso S. (2017). El mapa de las islas y las islas en el mapa. En: *Del Mundo al Mapa y del Mapa al Mundo: Objetos, Escalas e Imaginarios del Territorio*. Memorias 6º Simposio Iberoamericano de Historia de la Cartografía. Alejandra Vega Palma (compiladora). Libro electrónico. Universidad de Chile y Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Santiago de Chile.

⁴⁴ Guerra Sabrina (2023). *Islas Fantásticas de la Mar Del Sur. Las Galápagos y las Salmón en la Cartografía Imperial*. Universidad San Francisco de Quito. Ecuador. INTUS-LEGERE HISTORIA/ ISSN 0718-5456| EISSN 0719-8949/Año 2023, Vol. 17 N° 1, pp. 43-70. <https://intushistoria.uai.cl/index.php/intushistoria/article/view/562/414>

in maps and for vindicating the pioneering role of Portuguese cartographers in the knowledge of the southeastern Pacific.

Lopo Homem's work represents a historical turning point. His map is the first to include the toponym "*I. des galapagos*", in a location consistent with geographic reality, considering the technical limitations of the 16th century for determining longitude. This occurs 15 years before figures like Gerard Mercator (1569) or Abraham Ortelius (1570) integrated the archipelago into their works, and, in both cases, they did so with toponymic or locational errors, suggesting reliance on secondary sources.

It is particularly striking that this cartographic primacy came from a Portuguese cartographer, given that, according to the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the Galápagos were within the Spanish sphere of influence. The most plausible explanation, supported by the document, is that Lopo Homem had access to privileged information, likely from the Casa de la Contratación in Seville, the nerve center of Spanish geographic knowledge. Documents such as Bishop Tomás de Berlanga's letter (1536), who accidentally sighted the islands and described the giant tortoises ("*galapagos*") that gave the archipelago its name, circulated there.

Homem was a cartographer with close ties to Iberian circles. He participated in the Badajoz-Elvas Conferences (1524) as an expert in territorial disputes, alongside figures like Hernando Colón and Juan Vespucci. This position likely allowed him access to maps, reports, and nautical charts not available to the public or other cartographers of the time. In a context of geopolitical rivalry and clandestine information exchange between Spain and Portugal, it is coherent that Lopo Homem used Spanish information to create his 1554 map.

The relevance of Homem's planisphere lies not only in its chronological precedence but also in its role as the starting point for a family cartographic tradition. His son Andreas Homem, in his 1559 map, and Diogo Homem, in 1568, continued to represent the Galápagos under the inherited designation, consolidating their presence in cartography before Ortelius and Mercator. This continuity reinforces the idea that the Homem family served as a bridge between Iberian nautical explorations and the visual representation of the Pacific, contributing to fixing a territory that, at the time, still lacked evident economic or political value.

It is important to emphasize that, while maps prior to Lopo Homem's—such as Sancho Gutiérrez' (1551)—already hinted at the presence of islands in positions consistent with the Galápagos, they lacked specific nomenclature, so they cannot be considered formal representations. Only with Lopo Homem does an unequivocal identification occur, a cartographic act that grants symbolic existence to the archipelago in the Western world.

Finally, this revision demands a critical rereading of traditional historiography, which has erroneously attributed primacy to Ortelius and Mercator due to the wide dissemination of their printed maps and the limited access, for centuries, to Portuguese manuscript maps. The recent digitization of these documents has allowed for the recovery and validation of key sources like Lopo Homem's planisphere, evidencing that Portugal played a much more significant role than previously recognized in constructing the geographic imaginary of the New World.

The study highlights a historiographic omission that must be corrected and restores to Portuguese cartography—and especially to Lopo Homem—the central place it deserves in the early representation of the Galápagos archipelago in 16th-century maps.